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ABSTRACT

The author relates some experiences regarding special education in developing countries. Pointed out is the presence of such basic principles as the priority of the handicapped and the importance of the human relationship. (SBH)

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WHAT HAVE WE TO GIVE
WHAT HAVE WE TO RECEIVE
WHAT WE DEAL WITH THE DEVELOPPING COUNTRIES ?

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In Special Education as in other matters the cooperation between the so-called developed (or more industrialized) countries and the so-called under-developed or developing ones has been too long considered like an one-way street. Everything should come from the developed countries and go to the developing ones. So the last ones were seen as having only to receive, the first ones as having only to give. Richnesses and science and competence as well as power were considered as the privilege of the same side.

A second step has led us to the opposite reaction. Then we have often heard that the developing countries have nothing to receive from the developed ones. Problems were supposed to be so different that experiences were absolutely not transferable. Consequently we had to let the new nations try to do their own experiments and researches and not to interfere in them. If you like, give some money, but no advices, no counseling, no programs. The developing countries are perfectly able to find by themselves what is best appropriate for them...Such has been the second stage.

Fortunately it seems that just now we are reaching a third step. In fact both preceding attitudes are equally wrong and, at the same time,

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both contain a certain truth. What is right in all matters of cooperation is particularly true in the field of special education; that is to say: every country, developed or developing, has something to give and something to receive.

And we would like to deliver here some of the practical experiences, able to illustrate by concrete examples this assertion, experiences that we personally have gathered all over the world during near thirty years of our international life and almost continuous traveling.

Point 1 - According to our experience, it is not right to say that developing countries have nothing to receive - except perhaps some money - from the hands of the developed ones. We have seen a waste of wealth and energy by lack of experience: for instance, giant and inconvenient buildings which had cost a deal and would have been realized with more modest means and more opportunity for doing good educational work if the people in charge of their realization would have taken some advices of these developed nations which have known this kind of institutions, and have so much suffered of their inadequacy.

Point 2 - But it is equally true that the more copy of what has been realized in the developed countries may produce a ridiculous and even dangerous caricature. Let us take for example some methods of this so-called "behaviour modification" which has formerly met a so great enthusiasm in some industrialized countries to obtain a "normalization" of the "exceptional"...Now we see that these methods have the fundamental inconvenient to remove the child's real, essential interest from the inner, intrinsical value of an action and focus it in an external reward to be obtained or an external punishment to be avoided and considered as reinforcing this

action. Consequently, these methods are now more and more considered as an over-simplification of little and negative efficiency, as dangerous for an human being and perverting the educational process. What a pity when they are adopted now by certain developing countries in the most simplistic way at the same time they are abandoned by these who were, a few years ago, so fond of their practice.

Point 3 - And precisely, one of the services, the so-called developing countries may deliver to the so-called developed ones may be the fruit of more natural and healthy concepts in matter of special education and therapeutics. The World Health Organization now is more and more considering that we have very much to learn for the daily medical means used in the villages and in the bush. Why not in special education?

For instance we have been very impressed by what we have seen in Latin America in the field of early stimulation with the cooperation of the mothers and also of volunteers. Concerning the volunteers we have seen many of them coming not only as students or idle women but as highly qualified people giving part of their precious time for the handicapped.

Other example: we have seen in Asia much more variety in the tasks offered in pre-vocational institutions or sheltered workshops than in many industrialized countries where the handicapped is transformed in a robot. There also we have been able to observe in some institutions the grouping of children or teen-agers belonging to various types of handicaps with an evident advantage of complementarity and mutual aid at the same time we were over-classifying exceptional children and adolescent people in the developed countries. And now, these developed countries are just becoming to understand the nuisances of this over-classification and segregation.

In some developing countries, like in Africa for instance, we have also observed the outstanding importance of the basic education. In many developed countries everything is excessively centered in School and Education means school and classroom. Educator means teacher. In many developing countries it is absolutely clear that a real, basic education is given out of the classroom: in the family, in the tribe, in the village. We have understood that in France we were right when we have trained at the same time - but on a pretty different may - specialized teachers for the classroom and specialized educators for the everyday life activities and both personnels on an University level, because we consider as fundamental these everyday life activities for educational and also therapeutic goals.

Conclusion: Finally going through the developing countries two main things have appeared to us as a precious discovery or, at least, as a recall of basic principles, very useful for the more industrialized nations;

1. The priority of the handicapped. It is false to think that exceptional children have not to be taken into consideration as long as the so-called "normal" ones have not been integrated into regular schools. We have been very sensitive to this answer that we have received during some private talks or even official congresses from people of developing countries, in Middle East and Far East for instance: "Our handicapped children have greatest needs than the normal ones. So they have a right of priority. Without school, the normal ones can more or less shift for themselves. The handicapped cannot. So we have not, for helping the handicapped, to wait until the other ones are educated. The most handicapped,

the most in need, the first to be helped."

2. The importance of the human relationship. The quality of relationship of many educators and teachers of developing countries has been for us a refreshment. Too often in the industrialized nations we are "dried up" by too sophisticated methods or too absorbed by our personal claims and we forget the children, we forget that every improvement belongs to this quality of the human interrelation. I was surprised, many years ago, when I saw, for the first time, so many families camping around the hospitals, in Africa for instance, in order not to abandon their sick member. At the same time we were strictly forbidding in many industrialized countries the presence of parents in our children's hospitals. Now in many developed countries, this presence is permitted, even encouraged. That is a symbol. Developing countries may recall us many fundamental values which condition every therapeutic and every special or regular education.

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